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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: PRESIDENT BUSH'S IRAQ SECURITY PLAN

¶1. Summary: Taiwan's major Chinese-language dailies continued to give extensive reporting and editorial coverage January 13-16 to the scandal-ridden Rebar Asia Pacific Group, of which the chairman and his wife have fled to the United States, and on the political impact this incident has produced. With regard to President Chen Shui-bian's trip to Nicaragua and his transit of the United States, the pro-independence "Liberty Times," Taiwan's largest-circulation daily, ran a banner headline on page four January 14 that read "Bian [Receives] Courtesy Treatment for His Transit, U.S.-Taiwan Ambiance Improved."

¶2. In terms of editorials and commentaries, a commentary in the pro-status "China Times" discussed U.S. President George W. Bush's new Iraq security plan and said even though the Democratic Party and liberal media outlets continued to lash out at Bush's plan, the chances are slim for them to derail this new policy. An editorial in the limited-circulation, conservative, pro-unification "China Post" said "Bush's mea culpa sounds insincere," as he did not admit that the war in Iraq is wrong in the first place. End summary.

A) "Opponents Can Hardly Repudiate Bush's Plan to Send More Troops [to Iraq]"

Loh I-cheng, a veteran Taiwan diplomat, commented in his column in the pro-status quo "China Times" [circulation: 400,000] (1/15):

"... A careful reading of Bush's address indicated that its center of emphasis was to shift the heavy burden that has been on the U.S. shoulders the past four years over to the Iraqi government. The security plan for Baghdad is just the first step, and by the end of November 2007, U.S. troops will hand over all peace-keeping responsibilities within the borders of Iraq to the military and police troops governed by the Iraqi government. When reading between the lines, it means that it will be Iraq's responsibility if it makes a hash of everything, and it will have nothing to do with the United States. ...

"When viewed as a whole, President Bush's new Iraq strategy is indeed very different from his previous one. There is a big change in his policy, and it is a wild gamble. [Bush's] stake is not simply about whether he and his Republican Party will be able to secure a victory in next year's presidential elections but also about whether the United States will be able to maintain its national honor and its credibility in international society. Even though the Democratic Party and liberal media outlets continued to lash out [at Bush's plan], the chances are slim for them to derail this policy. ..."

B) "Bush: Mea Culpa"

The conservative, pro-unification, English-language "China Post" [circulation: 30,000] editorialized (1/13):

"... May war-weary Americans want to get American troops out of the Iraqi quagmire, which has turned out to be a black hole that sucks American dollars and devours American lives. Bush's dream of building a 'young democracy' in Iraq is now a nightmare of death and destruction for the Iraqi people. ... By escalating the unpopular war in Iraq, President Bush is following the footsteps of Richard Nixon, whose presidency was buried in Watergate and the Vietnam war.

Bush and a handful of American hawks still believe that the war in Iraq can be won by military might. But the war in the past four years had indicated otherwise. Bush's mea culpa sounds insincere, because he did not admit that the war is wrong in the first place. He is insisting that more American soldiers be sent to the killing fields to fight and win the war. But time is running out for Bush, who may well leave the mess he created to the next president."

YOUNG